

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: MILI, PGOV, CA

SUBJ: DEFENSE MINISTER UNDER FIRE FOR RACIAL SLUR

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY. SLUR AGAINST INDIANS AND ESKIMOS ATTRIBUTED TO DEFENCE MINISTER RICHARDSON IN CANADIAN MAGAZINE ARTICLE SEIZED UPON BY ISSUE-HUNGRY OPPOSITION. RICHARDSON CATEGORICALLY DENIES MAKING OFFENDING STATEMENT, THEN RETREATS FROM DENIAL, WHILE WRITER OF ARTICLE INSISTS STATEMENT MADE AS QUOTED. END SUMMARY

1. IN HATCHET-JOB ARTICLE IN MARCH MACLEAN'S MAGAZINE DEFENCE MINISTER JAMES RICHARDSON IS QUOTED BY WRITER MARCI MCDONALD AS STATING, IN REFERENCE TO INDIANS AND ESKIMOS: "I MEAN, WHAT DID THEY EVER DO FOR CANADA? DID THEY DISCOVER GAS? DID THEY DISCOVER OIL? THEY DIDN'T EVEN INVENT THE WHEEL. WHY, WHEN WE CAME HERE, THEY WERE STILL DRAGGING THINGS AROUND ON TWO STICKS."

2. MATTER WAS RAISED IN COMMONS FEB 27 BY NDP MEMBER FROM NORTHWEST TERRITORIES WALLY FIRTH, WHO IS METIZ (HALF INDIAN). RICHARDSON DENIED "IN MOST CATEGORICAL AND DEFINITE TERMS" HAVING MADE STATEMENT. WHEN MATTER RAISED AGAIN NEXT DAY IN COMMONS BY NDP LEADER BROADBENT, WHOSE ATTEMPT TO HAVE ISSUED REFERRED

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TO COMMITTEE WAS BLOCKED BY THE SPEAKER, RICHARDSON

STATED, "I DID NOT UTTER THOSE WORDS IN ANYTHING RESEMBLING THE SENTIMENT THAT IS EXPRESSED IN THOSE WORDS" (SIC). INTERVIEWED BY NEWSMEN THERE- AFTER, RICHARDSON STATED THAT HE HAD NOT USED THE WORDS ATTRIBUTED TO HIM "IN THAT CONTEXT" AND WHEN QUESTIONED ADDED QUICKLY "OR IN ANY OTHER CONTEXT." HE EXPLAINED THAT THE CLOSET HE HAD COME TO SUCH WORDS WAS IN A DISCUSSION WITH MISS MCDONALD OF THE MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE IN THE COURSE OF WHICH HE HAD OBSERVED THAT "WE CANADIANS HAD WALKED OVER THE OIL AND GAS IN CANADA FOR YEARS AND THE INDIANS YEARS BEFORE THAT AND IT WASN'T UNTIL THE AMERICANS CAME THAT THE OIL AND GAS WERE DISCOVERED."

3. MISS MCDONALD INSISTS THAT HER QUOTATION WAS ACCURATE, STATING TO NEWSMEN THAT "ONE NEITHER FICTIONALIZES OR FORGETS A QUOTE LIKE THAT," TWISTING THE KNIFE A TURN BY ADDING THAT RICHARDSON MADE THE COMMENTS HALFWAY ACROSS THE ATLANTIC ON AN AIRCRAFT "AFTER SEVERAL RYES AND GINGER ALES." ASIDE FROM THE RACIAL SLUR, HER ARTICLE HAD PORTRAYED RICHARDSON AS A POOR LITTLE RICH BOY (WHO FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH A BUS STOP WAS WHEN HE WENT TO ONE TO SHAKE HANDS IN A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN), A TOTAL INNOCENT IN THE WAYS OF THE WORLD, PRONE TO SUCH GAFFES AS ENDORSING TURKISH POLICY IN CYPRUS WHEN THE GOC WAS OFFICIALLY NEUTRAL, UNPOPULAR WITH THE CANADIAN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND SO RARE A VISITOR TO HIS OWN MINISTRY THAT HIS ENTRY THERETO WAS CHALLENGED AT THE PASSGATE TWO YEARS AFTER HE HAD ASSUMED THE PORTFOLIO. SHE HAD DESCRIBED HIS ONLY INTEREST IN GOVERNMENT AS A RATHER DILETTANTE FASCINATION. HAVING SERVED ON MANY LARGE BOARDS OF DIRECTOR IN CANADA, WITH THE IDEA OF SITTING ON, IN HIS WORDS, "THE BIG BOARD, THE ULTIMATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AS IT WERE." SHE ALSO CLAIMED THAT HE BELIEVES THAT BILINGUALISM IS LEADING CANADA TO RACK AND RUIN AND THAT THIS ATTITUDE HAS COOLED HIS RELATIONS WITH PM TRUDEAU (THIS PART OF THE ARTICLE HAS NOT CAUSED A REACTION, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE RICHARDSON'S OPPOSITION TO THE BILINGUAL POLICY IS WELL KNOWN). FULL TEXT OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMENT: COMING ON THE HEELS OF A "HARBORGATE" SCANDAL INVOLVING LABOR MINISTER MUNRO, THIS INCIDENT WILL ADD TO THE IMPRESSION THAT PM TRUDEAU HAS BEEN UNFORTUNATE IN HIS CHOICE OF SOME OF HIS CABINET

COLLEAGUES. THE OPPOSITION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO BELABOR THE INCIDENT, AND THERE MAY BE SOME REFLECTIONS OF IT IN THE COURSE OF THE INQUIRY INTO "NATIVE" RIGHTS WHICH WOULD BE AFFECTED BY ANY MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE, WHICH OPENS TODAY IN YELLOWKNIFE. HOWEVER, ASIDE FROM ADDING TO THE LIMITATIONS ON RICHARDSON'S POLITICAL AMBITIONS, IF ANY, THE INCIDENT HAS ARISEN TOO EARLY IN THE PRESENT TRUDEAU ADMINISTRATION TO CAUSE THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT MORE THAN A TEMPORARY CASE OF HEARTBURN. EMBASSY NOTES ALSO THAT WHILE MOST CANADIANS GIVE LIP SERVICE TO NATIVE RIGHTS, MANY ACTUALLY MAY SHARE SENTIMENTS HE IS ALLEGED TO HAVE EXPRESSED.

4. RICHARDSON HAS BEEN VERY UNPOPULAR WITH CANADIAN MILITARY WHO ACCUSE HIM OF VACILLATING AND INDECISION, LACK OF INTEREST IN MILITARY PROBLEMS, AND OF BEING OVERLY CONCERNED WITH PUTTING MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN AND AROUND HIS NATIVE WINNIPEG. MACLEAN'S ARTICLE MAY IN LARGE MEASURE BE DERIVED FROM DISGRUNTLED MILITARY SOURCES. IN ANY EVENT, TRUDEAU IS UNLIKELY TO REACT VERY STRONGLY AGAINST RICHARDSON, WHO IS ONE OF ONLY THREE LIBERALS FROM PRAIRIE PROVINCES. PORTER

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